Spectres of Multiplicity. 18th-Century Literature Revisited from the Outside in

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SPECTRES OF MULTIPLICITY
Eighteenth-Century Literature Revisited from its Outsides

FRENCH GLOBALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

From the age of Louis XIV to the Jacobin Revolution, the French eighteenth century is often portrayed as dreaming *an enduring dream of unity*. A great deal of administrative and intellectual energy was spent in attempting to unify the territory under one king, the people under one law, the beliefs under one God, the artists under one academy, the warring European nations under one scheme of perpetual peace, the branches of knowledge under one encyclopaedic tree, the erring variety of customs and superstitions under one ideal of universal rationality, and the annoying diversity of idioms (regional or national) under one standardized and unifying language – the Parisian French spoken at the Court, regulated by the official Academy, and blessed by the one King (anointed by true God). What was a mere fantasy in 1700 appeared to have become a historical reality by the end of the century: in a global survey which anticipates (in a euphoric mode) our current anxieties about cultural homogenization among world cultures, Louis-Antoine Caraccioli explained in *L'Europe française ou Paris modèle des nations* (*French Europe or Paris as a model of nations*, 1776) that everyone in Europe ate, drank, dressed, spoke, read, socialized, and thought in the same (French) fashion. Nicolas Baudeau, one of the early Economists who, also in the 1770s, claimed the universal and "natural" validity of free-market mechanisms, demonstrated to a young aristocratic lady that, looking no further than her lunch table, she could find the obvious proof of an already-globalized world-market, which satisfied her daily needs (and whims) by bringing her wheat from Poland, porcelain from China, spoons made from Peruvian iron, and sugar cultivated in Haiti by slaves dragged out of Africa[1]. By the time Napoleon conquered most of continental Europe and divided it into quasi-French departments, the "Grand Design" of political unification dreamt by Henry IV and his minister Sully (revived by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre around 1713, and revisited by Rousseau in the 1750s[2]) briefly appeared on the verge of a lasting triumph.

Scratch under the surface of such dreams of global unity, and you'll find the French eighteenth century full of *countless nightmares of division*. Bitter religious conflicts opposed not only Catholics to Protestants, but, within the Catholic party, the Jansenists against the Jesuits. Goods travelling within France were still stopped at every corner, in order to pay local duties and meet local legislations. When a Parisian aristocrat left his salon, ventured into the country side, and met a peasant, he still wondered whether that dark-skinned animal, emitting undecipherable grunts, fully belonged to the human race (and to a civilized nation)[3]. Rousseau himself, even though his political theory fuelled the Jacobin attempts to homogenize modern Republics, envisioned true democracy as possible only within small-scale independent city-States. Anxieties about the "many-headed hydra" of the uncontrolled multitudes[4] haunted

most political theorists of the classical age, with constant reminders brought by food-riots and tax-revolts, culminating in the large waves of castle-burnings and street-demonstrations of the Revolution.

So while many French Enlighteners saw themselves living in (or on the verge of) *an age of global Frenchitude* – advancing on a path of human unification and rationalization, pushing ever further the gates that kept the (religious and obscurantist) Barbarians at bay – they were also constantly reminded of *the inner borders* which constantly tended to fragment French globality *from the inside*. Contrary to its superficial reputation of arrogant and imperialistic rationality, the French eighteenth century was also a cultural site which experienced, cultivated and theorized diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Where can we locate these inner borders within the literary field? What types of exteriority and "aliens" animated French minds from the inside during this period? These are some of the questions I will address in this chapter, through a very selective tour of the countless spectres of multiplicity which haunted eighteenth-century minds.

FAIRY POWER

The study of eighteenth-century literature has often suffered from a double optical illusion. First, *the whole period has been identified with (and reduced to) the sole Enlightenment movement*, which accounts for only a relatively small (if brilliant) minority of the works actually produced at the time. Second, a common misperception has projected an anachronistic unity over a field that had not yet been unified as such: for, up until the very end of the century, *"literature" did not exist as such*. From Furetière's *Dictionary* (1690) to Marmontel's *Elements of Literature* (1787), the word "literature" was defined neither as a certain body of works (characterized by their aesthetic value), nor as a certain attitude towards writing (aiming at beauty as much as truth) – but as a particular form of erudition, characterized by a familiarity with the classical works comprising what we would call today the "Humanities": *la connaissance profonde des lettres* ["an intimate knowledge of the *litterae*"].

Once the homogenizing effects of these two misperceptions are neutralized, the eighteenth century no longer appears as a continuous progression going from Marivaux's theatre to Laclos' *Dangerous Liaisons*, through the abbé Prévost's sentimental novels and Voltaire's philosophical tales. A much wider range of writing practices and ideological positions reemerge, reminding us that, at that time, a written work was never perceived as "literary", but was first and foremost identified by its genre. Authors did not write "plays" or "fictions", but tragedies, comedies (or rather comedies with ariettas, parades, tragicomedies, dramas, etc.), or elegies, or epic poems, or memoirs, or epistolary novels, etc.. Instead of the unity of "literature", one had *a* multiplicity of genres. And the main novelty, within this wide landscape of generic practices that had been mapped since Aristotle, was a genre which has so far been neglected and buried under scorn by literary history: the fairy tale.

It goes against our grain to see the fairy tale as the only true generic innovation of the early modern period, but such is the case: within a few years of its date of birth in 1690, the *conte de fées* became not only a most fashionable art of writing (closely associated with the camp of the Moderns in their famous Quarrel against the Ancients, thanks to the prominent role played by Perrault), but the object of heated theoretical debates. Originally practiced mainly by women (Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier de Villandon, Henriette-Julie de Murat), it simultaneously charmed and shocked its (mostly adult) readers by insolently defying all the rules of mimesis and verisimilitude, and by pretending to draw its inspiration from ignorant wet-nurses instead of Aristotle. If fairy powers, metamorphosed

pumpkins and magic sticks took everyone by surprise during the last decade of the 17th century, this purely modern innovation really took off only when writers came to hybridize it with another most heated fashion of the period, the Oriental tale, launched by the translation of the *Arabian Nights* Antoine Galland started to publish after 1705. The crossing between the self-parodic lightness provided by women tale-writers and the amazing imagination of the Arab tradition proved unstoppable: for decades, all of France wrote Oriental marvel tales – not only "specialized" authors like Hamilton or Crébillon fils, but also "serious" philosophers like Jean-François Melon, Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, Charles Duclos, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot[5].

Throughout its complex evolution (from mostly female to mostly male authors, from innocuous fantasy to sacrilegious eroticism, from moral lessons to subversive politics), the hybridization between the fairy and the Oriental tale generated a dense, ceaseless and fascinating activity of *redrawing all imaginable borders*. If this apparently "minor" genre played indeed a crucial role in the poetic, as well as in the political and philosophical *experimentations* of the period[6], it is because it provided a virtually unbounded freedom to its practitioners: not only the freedom to stage libertine forms of intercourse between the sexes, but a total freedom to *play with* all the parameters of knowledge. In the world of Arab sultans and fairy ladies, far from the constraints of the European male rulers and philosophers, *everything could happen* and the most unthinkable chains of causes and effects could be toyed with and reflected upon: a person's soul could inhabit another person's body (Moncrif's *Les Âmes rivales*, "Rival Souls", 1738), shared magical beliefs could create monetary value out of mere paper notes (Melon's *Mahmoud le Gasnevide*, 1729), statues and puppets could come alive to teach us the virtues of humanity (Bibiena's *La Poupée*, "The Puppet", 1747), women's genitalia could (finally) express what a woman really wants (Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, "The Indiscreet Jewels", 1748), courtiers could mock their tyrannical ruler with impunity (Crébillon's *Le Sopha*, 1742). More importantly, the authors of such tales put themselves in the position of questioning all of our deepest beliefs in "reality", and disorienting all our prejudices. Orientalized fairies provided a radically exterior point of view on French realities, wherefrom political power, religious dogma, moral maxims, scientific knowledge, technological artefacts or financial schemes as we thought we knew them could appear as pure marvels; that is, as supernatural phenomena worthy of our amazement, our critical disbelief and our best explanatory efforts[7].

The various waves of Oriental fairy tales which took over France in the first half of the eighteenth century thus constituted a discreet but nevertheless important site of early globalized literature. This displacement of perspective was provided by an Orientalist setting which visited the sultanates and imperial courts of anything located South and East of the Mediterranean from Morocco to China, through Persia and Mongolia. But scholars have shown that, under this thin and dubious polish of exoticism, many authors of such tales following Galland had familiarized themselves with--and had abundantly looted--the most significant cycles of tales developed in the Arab, Turkish, Persian, Indian and Chinese traditions. Along with the *translatio studii* and the *translatio philosophiae*, which had previously (re)imported Aristotelian doctrines and sciences from the South of the Mediterranean world, this *translatio fabularum* deserves to be identified as one of the most important foreign sources of French literary identity.

HELPLESS IN MULTIPLICITY

The extra-territorial site of questioning and debates provided by Oriental fairy tales rapidly came to be invested through and through by philosophical concerns. The ultimate

stake of most of these works, under the surface of their light tone and self-parody, consisted in raising the question of the relation between discourses and beliefs: what am I to believe in what I hear and read? More precisely: what, and whom, am I to believe among the multiplicity of contradictory explanations and narratives offered to me from so many different sources? Even though the printing press was invented at the end of the fifteenth century, it is only in the eighteenth century that rates of literacy really started to take off – the number of individuals capable of deciphering a written text (and/or of signing their names) roughly doubled from 1700 to 1800. Countless indicators show the same strikingly ascending curves: the number of books printed, the number of new titles published, the proportion of books published in French (instead of Latin), the proportion of pocket-size "paperbacks" (instead of impractical in-folios), the number of periodicals available to the public, all such figures present a dramatic increase through the century, with an even steeper surge after 1750. It could be argued that scholastic philosophy, early on in the Middle Ages, was already an attempt to deal with an overload of contradictory information. The novelty of our period is that this experience was no longer limited to a few monastery libraries scattered in the countryside, but became an increasingly common preoccupation among city dwellers, who were exposed to a constantly increasing offer of books and periodicals: 40 new periodicals appeared in the 1720s, against 167 in the 1780s)[8]. Lost in this multiplicity, where was one to find the proper filter (i.e., literally, the proper critical attitude) to sort out the true from the illusory? Empowering readers to discriminate between the (true new) "sciences" and the (old superstitious) "fables" was a constant preoccupation among writers from Pierre Bayle and his famous *Critical Dictionary* to Voltaire and his corrosive depictions of the limitless erring of the human mind[9].

The critique of "superstitions" performed by the Philosophes was not only anchored in their epistemological and political struggle against the obscuring of minds by Christian institutions. It was also deeply rooted in a literary tradition going back all the way to Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* which revelled in depicting naïve readers fooled by their fantastic readings[10]. Following the seventeenth century satirical novels of Cyrano de Bergerac, Sorrel, Scarron, or Montfaucon de Villars' *Le Comte de Gabalis ou Entretiens sur les sciences secrètes* (*The Count of Gabalis or Discussions on the Secret Sciences*, 1671), countless novels of the early eighteenth century showed protagonists literally maddened by their readings in alchemy, demonology, medicine, philosophy or speculative finance – resulting in writing experiments where the authors themselves ended up carried away by their own "monstruous" novels[11]. One good illustration of this tradition is provided by Laurent Bordelon's *L'histoire des imaginations extravagantes de Monsieur Oufle causées par la lecture des livres qui traitent de la magie, du grimoire* (*History of Mister Oufle's Extravagant Imaginations, caused by his Reading Books of Magic Spells*, 1710). Half-way between Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Molière's *Précieuses Ridicules* on one side, and Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* on the other, this novel narrates the misadventures experienced by a character who cannot tell the difference between the "true" sciences developed by post-Cartesian investigation and the ridiculous superstitions printed all over old and new books, or carried around by popular rumors and periodical papers. Unfortunate circumstances, and a little wine, lead him to start behaving like the werewolf he had read so much about; other people's credulity not only reinforces his own, but triggers responses which act out in reality the type of behaviors that began as purely imaginary. It is fitting that the protagonist's name, Mister Oufle, can be read as an anagram of both "the madman" (*le fou*) and "the crowd" (la *foule*): a victim of the multiplication of bad books and of the multiplicity of erroneous beliefs, the man is maddened by a conjunction of solitary readings and gregarious behaviors.

Similar epidemics of delusional beliefs were often denounced on the comic stages of the turn of the century: from the 1679 play *La Devineresse ou les Faux enchantements* (The

Soothsayer or the False Enchantments) by Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Vizé, countless comedies portrayed naïve victims adhering without any critical sense to various forms of seductive discourses displayed around them – with a particular emphasis on the traps and surprises of financial speculation. Before, during and well after the time of John Law's spectacular bankruptcy during the Regency, dozens of plays introduced to a wider public in a bitingly critical tone, the new speculative toys (stock exchange transactions, securities, derivatives) as soon as they were invented by the traders of the time: in many ways, playwrights were well ahead of the theorists of the newborn economic science in their understanding of the traps of the financial markets[12].

Through the examples of *Mister Oufle* and of these financial comedies, the novel and the comic stage appear as privileged sites of representation of the individual's helplessness in a world where claims to truth, miraculous cures, love potions, astrological predictions and speculative schemes multiply out of control. Voltaire's Candide, who is naïve enough to believe, against all evidence, his teacher's lesson that "all is for the best in the best of worlds", is only a late avatar in this long tradition of gullible characters – just as today's denunciations of the unreliability of some wacky Internet sites are only the latest form of the anxiety raised by the uncontrollable superabundance of unauthorized discourses, characteristic of the epistemological regime of modernity.

For beyond the so-often repeated clichés about the threats and promises of "Alterity", the real challenge of modernity, as it emerged in the eighteenth century, is that of *multiplicity*: not simply the "difference" presented by one absolutized "Other", which tends to keep us prisoners of binary oppositions (male/female, inside/outside, civilized/savage) – but the particular form of helplessness caused by solicitations and possibilities which, because they come from all sides, force us to (fail to) look in all directions at the same time. Lost in an ocean of newly emerged "sciences", which often clashed against the most deeply ingrained certitudes of shared traditional beliefs, where was the reader of 1730 supposed to find a rock of indisputable truth, or a least a reliable compass? Surrounded by a thousand lights of hope, how was he or she to tell apart trustworthy lighthouses from shipwreckers' fires?

The dramatic increase in the number of periodicals can be seen simultaneously as a symptom, as a part and as a partial response to this problem. In an earlier (idealized) regime of publication, even after one had given up hope of finding all truths flow from a single authoritative Book (the Bible, Aristotle's *Opera*, Gallen's medical treatise), a printed volume would be authorized by the official Permission granted by the King and/or by the religious authorities. Along with the slow victory of Cartesian epistemology over the scholastic model of Authority, the impressive multiplication of books made available during the 18th century dramatically corroded the trust a reader could invest in printed material. Among the 1,548 different titles published in the sole year 1764, for instance, less than half were covered by the official regime of Privilege or Permission; three quarters were new works, and about a fourth seems to have come from outside of France[13].

Within such an overwhelming landscape, periodicals could offer a possible solution to the anxiety of multiplicity, insofar as they offered reviews of the most important publications. The journalist was taking over the job of the theologian in authorizing, or disqualifying, the validity of a book: he worked as a filter, a most valuable and strategic function in the regime of modern multiplicity. Such a solution, however, raised its own problems: not only were periodicals quite expensive to subscribe to, but they too came in the form of multiplicity. The 1764 reader had to choose between more than a hundred titles of periodical publications, most of which contradicted each other (if only in order to find their niche in an increasingly competitive market): the *Mercure de France* was denounced by its competitors as being systematically laudatory toward anything official, since it was closely connected to the powers-that-be. In reaction to this failure to filter, other reviewers were accused of being too

uniformly corrosive, undermining all aesthetic and moral values. Periodicals like the *Correspondance littéraire* by Grimm and Meister, or the *Mémoires secrets* (traditionally but erroneously attributed Bachaumont) provide a fascinating daily account of the fads, political scandals, ephemeral stardom and intellectual trends which pushed "public opinion" (a notion which was emerging at this very moment) in contradictory movements, which reversed direction almost every week[14].

The conundrums of multiplicity were often perceived as located at the borders of the French kingdom, spreading the fear of seeing the nation besieged and surrounded by countless foreign invaders. Apart from the masses of fairly uncontroversial publications on piety, theology, law, history, technical sciences and love poetry, most of the "hot" items discussed in reading circles--the books we identify with the Enlightenment--were imports produced by presses located in Amsterdam, Geneva or London. So even if only a quarter of the actual volumes were produced outside of France, people of the time had the impression of being flooded with (French) novelties coming from all over Europe. In order to avoid the same royal and religious censorship which forced books to be printed abroad, the majority of the trendy periodicals also came from the same foreign cities, fuelling more anxieties about a kingdom besieged by French authors undermining Frenchitude through a European-wide circulation of nationless subversive publications. The fact that Rousseau claimed to be a citizen of Geneva, that Voltaire had settled in the vicinity of that same city, that D'Alembert was on the payroll of the Academy of Berlin, or that Diderot received part of his income from (and went to visit the court of) Catherine of Russia did not help to dissipate a common perception assimilating the Philosophes' cosmopolitanism to mere treason. From a Spanish novel conquering French fictions with its countless seeds of Quixotism, to a hundred surrounding lights of foreign journals (in charge of filtering a thousand more would-be Enlighteners), the French Enlightenment appears as having been under the siege of its own global multiplicity.

One novel produced at the very end of our period perfectly illustrates this global multiplicity. Written in French by Polish count Jean Potocki between 1794 and 1815, The *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (Manuscript found in Saragossa) narrates the encounter of a Belgian young man, a Spanish duke, a Jewish Cabbalist, a (fake) Christian hermit, a caravan of conquistadors returning from the Americas, a family of global bankers, a troop of Bohemian smugglers and an organization of Muslim fundamentalists – all sharing a nomadic life in a no man's land called the Sierra Morena. Through sixty days of adventures and stories, involving a truly maddening multiplicity of characters (in the hundreds), tales (in the dozens), literary genres, religions, disciplines, and contradictory philosophical views, the novel offers the most amazing and suggestive kaleidoscope of the whole European Enlightenment – the most maddening reading experience too, since the reader can never tell apart the realistic from the fantastic, the serious from the ironic. This most global novel concludes on a most hybrid marriage, which mixes the blood of a (fake) Jewish woman (who is actually the daughter of an Islamist fundamentalist) with that of a Christian officer seduced by an irresistible pair of Muslim cousins…

THE PHILOSOPHES' MANY-HEADED HYDRAS

All of the central figures of the French Enlightenment proposed their own way to deal with the conundrums of multiplicity. After revisiting France from an outsider's perspective in the *Persian Letters* (1721), after explaining in his *Reflections about Universal Monarchy* (1734) why a globalized political power had become practically impossible among modern nations, Montesquieu conceived his tentacular *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) as a way to account for the irreducible diversity of forms of social life. The challenge of his lifelong research was

to maintain simultaneously 1° that there were universal laws applying to all societies (just as there are universal laws of physics applying to all material objects in the universe) and 2° that these universal laws were bound to produce infinitely diverse modes of organization, according to the singularity of each site of development (its climate, the history and complexion of its people, the inertia of its institutions, its relations to its neighbors, etc.). How to produce a single theoretical framework accounting for the irreducible multiplicity of social organizations? That was the question that guided the author through the several decades he devoted to the composition of his monumental work.

Voltaire's frenetic publishing activity, after 1750, also put multiplicity at its very core. Instead of remaining the most famous author in the most prestigious literary genre of the time, the tragedy, instead of sticking to his official persona of Poet-Historian, courtier of the greatest European powers, Monsieur de Voltaire traded his most desirable signature for a multiplicity of borrowed identities and fantastic pseudonyms, under which he published thousands of short pieces flooding into France from printing presses spread all over Europe. One of the most common and exciting tasks of the journalists busying themselves with sorting out the superabundance of new titles proposed to the public consisted in trying to identify, among these constant flows, the small gems (a ten page pamphlet, a brief parody, a poem, a short Oriental tale) that Voltaire had had printed under one of his ever-changing pseudonyms. In the philosophical, political and literary world of the European 18th century, Voltaire should be conceived less as an individual author (a signature, a trademark) than as a collective body, a web-like agency, a network of allies, agents, informers, writers, printers, advertisers, ministers, investors. It could have been a full-time job – and it was one indeed for his greatest admirers or for his worst enemies – to sort out, collect and map the thousands of "flying pieces" (*pièces volantes*) this grey-headed writing Hydra managed to spread year after year in the trans-European intellectual winds.

It would be easy to show that Denis Diderot's twenty-year long work on the *Encyclopaedia* conjugated Voltaire's hydra strategy with Montesquieu's. Not only did Diderot assemble a multi-headed team of writers to account for the specificity of a multiplicity of disciplines, which a single human mind could no longer claim to encompass (a feat that was still conceivable less than a century earlier, in Leibniz's time): he also built his dictionary as an uncontrollable hydra whose countless attacks on traditional Christian ideology could raise their subversive heads in any place at any time. In his endless game of hide-and-seek with censorship – the official censorship of the King, but also the commercial censorship performed by his publisher – Diderot used all the resources of cross-references, digressions, side-remarks and deceptive headings to lose his censor, while guiding his reader through a maze of definitions which were at the same time unified and escaping control, through countless lines of flight.

Beyond the *Encyclopaedia* – which is the project he was identified with during his lifetime, since his most famous works were not printed before his death – Diderot's writings as a whole are the most fascinating and successful attempt ever produced to overcome the challenges of multiplicity while exploiting its sharpest potentials. Diderot never writes *as one*: all of his texts display *a* multiplicity of voices in constant dialogue, complicity and contradiction with each other. His frequent references to the Roman god Vertumnus, the divinity of metamorphoses and incessant changes, gives us the key to his literary as well as his intellectual endeavor: to provide pluralist accounts of the constantly evolving pluralities that compose each individual. In his most brilliant text, *D'Alembert's Dream* (1769) – comprising three different dialogues, with a compact but evolving cast of characters –Diderot unfolds the ontological framework within which multiplicity ought to be managed: all of Nature appears as one infinitely interconnected web of interdependent but also relatively autonomous individuals, who are themselves composed of smaller individuals in similar

relations of interdependent autonomy. A swarm of bees has no less claim to be seen as "one" individual than a human body, made of many organs, some of which can be removed or transplanted or transgendered. Any form of unity results from the conflictual collaboration of various (ultimately self-interested) individuals parts. There are no "essences" of any sort, but only temporary agglutinations of bodies, and unstable superpositions of relations. My "identity" is not a self-standing substance with which I am endowed for all eternity (as Christianity proclaims, and as we all are led spontaneously to believe), but the unstable result of the relational organization of a multiplicity of bodily parts and social relations.

It so happens that such a world-view was generally identified, in the 18th century, with one highly scandalous philosopher, Spinoza, who claimed that only nature as a whole could be seen as a self-standing "substance" and that every individual in it was only to be seen as a "mode", a mere nod in the infinitely intricate web of relations composing the universe. And it also happens that Spinozism was, from very early on, perceived by the predominantly Christian tradition as a global philosophy and a global threat. Spinoza himself, born a Jew of Portuguese descent, excommunicated by his community of origin in Amsterdam, represented the total Alien, anchored only in a circle of intellectual friends and correspondents spread all over Europe. His doctrine was widely denounced as similar to Chinese atheism or Turkish fatalism[15]. When warning against the horrific conclusions of this doctrine ("There is no such thing as free will"; "Divine Providence is an illusion"; "Virtue and right cannot be distinguished from might"), defenders of Christianity saw in the Spinozist invasion only the latest wave of assault coming from Oriental infidels always eager to attack or undermine the only true religion.

Several obscure writers apparently enjoyed identifying with this role of the absolute Outsider offered to them by Spinoza's ghost. Apart from summarizing in a few alexandrine verses *Spinoza's Anti-Theocratic System*, Jacques-Antoine Grignon des Bureaux, recently identified as such but presenting himself as "the Solitary of Champagne", decided to voice his atheistic and materialist views in a *Tintinnabulum Naturae* (1772) spoken through the mouth of a "half man, half beast", proudly "born from a black woman and an Orang-utan". He suggested we should imagine our world as resulting from the "agglobulation" of molecules into multiple layers of organization, the various types of (more or less purified) "globes" forming various "regimes", which assemble in their turn into the "spaces" that make up the "universe". Our human existence, like all other forms of life, consists in constant movements of emanations, modulations, volatilizations, precipitations and agglutinations of such "globes".

Another eccentric author could emblematize this chaotic agglobulation and hybridization of apparently unrelated and incompatible philosophical traditions and literary imaginaries. François Tiphaigne de la Roche, a modest and obscure physician from Normandy, published a dozen books ranging from an analysis of the depletion of fishing resources in the Atlantic to a novel-memoir retracing the wandering of his desires and affective attachments, as well as several utopian voyages, philosophical treatises on the nature of our dreams, a proposition to plant vineyards in the Northern regions of France, and a medical essay explaining our erotic impulses on the basis of olfactory "globules" released through our bodies' perspiration… An author like Tiphaigne has been scorned and neglected for centuries because he appears to us as an incoherent multiplicity devoid of deeper unity. He carelessly (and joyfully) mixes the most audacious materialist analyses with the most reactionary moral condemnations of the Philosophes' atheism; he seems to place on the same level of credibility the most recent discoveries in "scientific" physiology with the oldest and most fantastic claims about ghosts, sylphs and "elementary spirits". To the positivist, critical and rationalist minds that have written literary history so far, Tiphaigne can only appear as a new incarnation of Mister Oufle: someone who was not capable of filtering superstition out of

the overwhelming flows of information, counter-information and disinformation which assault us in the hyper-communicative regime of modernity.

And yet, for precisely the same reason, Tiphaigne offers a fascinating field of inquiry for whoever is interested in observing the global flows of discourses circulating through a sensitive and brilliant French brain in the third quarter of the 18th century. How many heads are talking simultaneously in Tiphaigne's utopian tale *Giphantie* (an anagram of his own name, 1760), or in Diderot's *Conversation between a Father and his Son* (1773)? Each of these writers constitutes a many-headed hydra, in constant exchange of information and images with several hydras coming from different epochs of history and from different parts of the world. As was the case with the invasion of Oriental tales in the wake of Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* after 1705 (which left many sedimentations in Tiphaigne's narratives), this brief intrusion into the circulation of philosophical imaginaries shows us a picture of intense global communication: from the classical texts of Chinese philosophy brought back by 17th century Jesuits to 18th century Montpellier physicians[16], from Spinoza's Amsterdam circle to Diderot's busy Parisian apartment, from Geneva's printing presses to Tiphaigne physician's office in Normandy, French globality is made up of a myriad of hybridizations which (conflictually) coexist while defying our best attempts to subsume them under any homogenizing pattern.

THE EXTERIORITY OF SENTIMENTS AND THE "IMPORT" OF LITERATURE

Among the Philosophes, the author who most strongly resisted the Sirens' calls of multiplicity was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. One could read all of his books as so many attempts to find a way to gather the various parts of himself into a unified whole. The explicit purpose of the *Social Contract* (1762) is to discover the proper way to unify a "multitude" into one "people", autonomously governed within the borders of one city-State. Rousseau's invariable message has been to call each one of us to go back into our self, to concentrate our forces within our interiority, to resist the countless calls for action, consumption or reputation which tend to alienate us from ourselves in the social regime of modernity. It is no wonder that this constant movement inward would lead him to write (and rewrite in three successive waves) his autobiography. It should not surprise us either that, when writing *Dialogues* (1776), he would stage a discussion between a character called "Rousseau" and a character called the "François" (*the French*, of course, but also simply *François*, his lost brother's first name), who both talk about, read and visit a third character called "Jean-Jacques": contrary to Diderot, who wrote dialogues in order to generate antagonistic ideas within his own thought, Rousseau multiplied the voices only to dig deeper into his one inner self.

It makes sense, therefore, that Rousseau should have written the most successful French sentimental novel of the eighteenth century: *Julie or the New Heloïse* (1761). It is the culture of interiority which led Rousseau to stand against all of his old Encyclopaedist friends (Diderot, Grimm, Holbach): while they defined justice and morality in terms of the beneficent effects of our behavior, he located the foundation of the Good in the agent's intentions and inner conscience; while they seemed happy to live as relational modes in a world of relational modes, he desperately clung to the hope of achieving an experience of his own identity as a self-standing substance. His epistolary novel drew gallons of tears from the eyes of his readers, male and female, because it depicted the inner struggles – the multiple *cas de conscience* – generated by the impossible love of Julie for her young teacher, Saint-Preux. After a first lapse in their youth, the two soul mates lived apart for the rest of their lives, Julie marrying the cold Spinozist philosopher Wolmar. Hundreds of pages of sentimental suffering led protagonists and readers alike to go deeper into themselves, in order to find the inner

resources needed to overcome external obstacles. The gesture of isolating oneself from a society perceived as a source of alienation rather than a source of commodities, exchanges and conviviality – a gesture which Rousseau had made in his own life, leaving the busy Parisian salons for a calm retreat in the countryside, and a gesture which he repeated in his writings by reorienting his last works from political philosophy to the narration of his autobiography – this gesture which goes simultaneously inward (the self) and outward (away from social ties) launched a wide movement of rejection toward corrupted and corrupting society, which directly led Europe into the Romantic age and ethos.

This active denial of, and resistance against, the multiplicity of our self was not, however, the only path the sentimental novel could follow to pursue its development. Its origins, in France, were somewhat comparable to those of the fairy tale, in that its distant sources drew both from a set of 17th-century women-writers (Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette, Madeleine de Scudéry) and from a foreign import (Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarisse Harlowe*). In the *Journal Étranger*, a periodical devoted to introducing in France the most important literary novelties produced abroad, Diderot wrote an enthusiastic *Éloge de Richardson* (*Praise of Richadson*, 1762), in which he analysed the sentimental novel as the most powerful tool for sculpting moral character in its readers, and for imprinting ethical values on the multitude. In the case of this particular import, however, Antoine-François Prévost had already prepared the ground for the success of the sentimental genre with novels like *Manon Lescaut* (1731) or *Cleveland* (1731-1739), and instead of becoming dominated by men, as the fairy and Oriental tales came to be, the epistolary sentimental novel provided a mode of writing were women continued to excel. Not simply women, but "frontier-women," with a particular inclination to narrate the stories of outsiders. Beside Françoise de Graffigny and her Peruvian Zilia lost in the alien universe of male Frenchitude (in the *Peruvian Letters*, 1747), and Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, an illegitimate daughter turned actress after being abandoned by her Italian husband, two writers particularly stand out.

Isabelle de Charrière, a young woman from the highest Dutch aristocracy, courted by most European intellectuals, settled for a retired life in the small village of Colombier, near Neuchâtel (between France and Switzerland), where she composed a string of brief masterpieces (*The Letters from Neuchâtel*, 1784; *Letters of Mistriss Henley*, 1784; *Three women*, 1795) devoted to exploring the multiple ways in which our inner feelings are inextricably tied to our relations with the exterior world. Her novels manage to suggest, with powerful subtlety, how the apparently most insignificant details of courtship and matrimonial life are in fact deeply connected with global colonialism, class relations, economic situations and gender oppression. These novels about failed marriages and disappointed matrimonial hopes reconcile Rousseau's effort to concentrate writing and ethics on the individual's inner conscience, with Diderot's Spinozist awareness of our individuality being merely a hypercomplex nod of relations between multiple and heterogeneous parts of the universe.

Germaine de Staël, daughter of the famous Geneva banker and French minister Necker, emigrated after the Revolution and put together a most important intellectual circle near Geneva, in Coppet, which can be considered as the source of a typically French current of "liberalism". The sentimental novels she wrote (*Delphine*, 1802; *Corrine*, 1806) also expressed the inescapable presence of exteriority at the heart of our most inner feelings. While her writing's political dimension was more open than Charrière's, these two outstanding intellectual figures of the turn of the century shared many sympathies (for the victims of emigration), interests (in German philosophy), insights (into the emergence of romanticism) and passions (for Benjamin Constant). It is from these Eastern frontiers, from places like Colombier and Coppet, and under the influence of writers like Charrière and de Staël that the heterogeneous French literary field came to exist as "literature": apart from sentimental novels and political essays, Germaine de Staël wrote two major (and interconnected) books of

"cultural studies", *De la littérature* (Of Literature, 1800) and *De l'Allemagne* (Of Germany, 1810), which both perfectly expressed and strongly redefined the new integrative relation Romanticism was to establish between the writing activity, the inner soul, a certain aesthetic sensitivity, a new national spirit, a critical political posture and a holistic cultural identity – an integration which came to be identified under the term "*literature*".

From Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* in 1705 to the publication of *De la littérature* in 1800, in a period when the French language could claim to be the *lingua franca* of Europe, we have seen that French writers drew their inspiration from multiple imports originating in Arabia, Persia, China, Holland, England, Germany.

We have also seen that, beyond the traditional descriptions of *the* Enlightenment (a dubious and misleading singular, in English), these writers constantly played with a multiplicity (of genres, of origins, of views, of relations) which simplistic views of Modernity tended to repress in the name of universality or rationality. That the many literary genres, all products of hybridizations, should have been unified after 1800 through the import of a German-inspired redefinition of the word "literature" confirms this general movement. Global Frenchitude throughout the eighteenth century was a hybrid and heterogeneous aspiration to unity, endlessly haunted and vitalized by countless foreign ghosts of multiplicity.

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[1] On the awareness of global economic forces among 18th-century French economists, see Yves Citton, *Portrait de l'économiste en physiocrate*, chapter 12 "Mondialisation".

[2] On these schemes of political unification, see Thomas Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought*. See also Yves Citton, "ConcateNations. Globalization in a Spinozist Context".

[3] Even if La Bruyère's famous depiction of the peasants is obviously to be read in the second degree, it expresses an attitude which remained prevalent in Old Regime France: "you see certain fierce animals, males and females, scattered throughout the countryside, black, livid, and completely burned from the sun, bound to the soil that they dig and stir up with invincible stubbornness; they have something like an articulate voice, and when they rise to their feet, they show a human face, and in effect they are human" (*Les Caractères*, chapter "Of Man" § 128 (IV) quoted and translated in Amy S. Wyngaard, *From Savage to Citizen. The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment*, p. 22 – see p. 13-34 of the same book for more quotes and discussions.

[4] See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

[5] For a synthetic presentation of the main stakes of this tradition, see Jean-Paul Sermain, *Le Conte de fées du classicisme aux Lumières* as well as Anne Defrance, *Les contes de fées et les nouvelles de Madame d'Aulnoy (1690-1698): L'imaginaire féminin à rebours de la tradition*. To follow current research in this field, see the various issues of the yearly journal *Féeries*.

[6] On the experimental dimension of such tales, see Régine Jomand-Baudry and Jean-François Perrin, *Le Conte merveilleux au XVIIIe siècle. Une poétique expérimentale*.

[7] For analyses of Oriental tales along these lines, see Jean-François Perrin, "Soi-même comme multitude: le cas du récit à métempsycose au 18e siècle" and Yves Citton, "Les comptes merveilleux de la finance. Confiance et fiction chez Jean-François Melon".

[8] See Jean Sgard, "La multiplication des périodiques", p. 198-205.

[9] For the structural effects of such a preoccupation on the literature of the time, see Jean-Paul Sermain, *Métafictions (1660-1730). La Réflexivité dans la littérature d'imagination*.

[10] On the presence of the Quixotic model in the literature of the time, see Jean-Paul Sermain, *Le Singe de Don Quichotte. Marivaux, Cervantes et le roman postcritique*, and Jean Mainil, *Don Quichotte en jupons : Ou des effets surprenants de la lecture - Essai d'interprétation de la lectrice romanesque au dix-huitième siècle*.

[11] See Mathieu Brunet, *L'Appel du monstrueux. Pensées et poétiques du désordre en France au XVIIIe siècle*.

[12] See Martial Poirson, « Quand l'économie politique était sur les planches : argent, morale et intérêt dans la comédie à l'âge classique » as well as Martial Poirson, *Économie du spectacle, Spectacle de l'économie* and *Dramaturgies économiques*.

[13] The main results of Jacqueline Artier's research on the publications of the year 1764 are summarized in Henri-Jean Martin, "Une croissance séculaire", p. 94-103.

[14] Both periodicals are currently receiving new scientific editions, which make their consultation much more rewarding. For the emergence of the notion of public opinion, see Keith Michael Baker, "Public Opinion as Political Invention", Mona Ozouf, "'Public Opinion' at the end of the Old Regime", Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire. L'opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle*, and Nicolas Veysman, *Mise en scène de l'opinion publique dans la littérature des Lumières*.

[15] On the history of Spinozism in 18th century France, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*, as well as Yves Citton, *L'Envers de la liberté. L'invention d'un imaginaire spinoziste dans la France des Lumières*.

[16] On the Chinese influence on the European Enlightenment, see for instance John James Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment : The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought*.